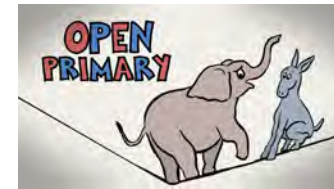


Open Primary Study



Purpose

- To evaluate the current primary system in Florida to determine whether it is a hindrance to voter turnout
- To evaluate selected election systems to determine if an open style system may yield improved voter participation



Methodology

- Conduct literature research to capture reasons for and solutions to low voter turnout
- Interview Supervisors of Elections and county political party chairs and correlate their views on low voter turnout
- Seek inputs from selected state leagues
- Survey Florida millennial voters and non-voters to determine their views on potential solutions to low voter turnout
- Evaluate selected election systems to determine if a switch to an open style system may yield improved voter turnout



Voting Systems Evaluated

- Closed
- Open with unaffiliated voters
- Open
- Top two
- Instant runoff voting



Definitions: Voting Systems (1)

- **Closed:** Voters must be registered party members and may only vote in their party primary; unaffiliated voters are excluded
- **Open to Unaffiliated Voters:** NPA voters may vote in any party primary they choose, but voters registered with one party may not vote in another party's primary
- **Open:** Voters generally not required to declare a party affiliation on the voter registration form, and choose their ballot privately



Definitions: Voting Systems (2)

- **Top Two:** All candidates are listed on the same, common ballot, and the top two vote getters in each race—regardless of party—advance to the general election
- **Instant Runoff (aka Ranked Choice):** Voters rank candidates in order of preference. If one candidate fails to achieve a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-preferences rankings is eliminated, and these votes are redistributed to the remaining candidates. The process repeats until one candidate achieves the required majority. A common ballot is used by all voters, regardless of party affiliation.



Five Key Findings

1. Florida's closed primary turnout is significantly lower than that for open election systems (and even some other closed primary states)
2. Florida's primary turnout is affected by many complex factors
3. Florida's 3.4+ million—and that number is growing—NPA/minor party registered voters are excluded from voting in primaries
4. Administrative/legislative actions are insufficient to address many reasons for low turnout (e.g., candidate quality or voter apathy)
5. Replacing Florida's closed primary system would require legislative **and** constitutional changes



Factors Influencing Voter Turnout



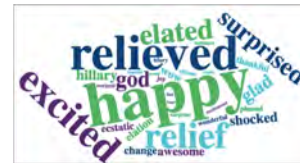
Awareness / Publicity / Education

- Less publicity for primaries than for general elections
- Lack of civic education
- Lack of parents modeling being a voter for their children



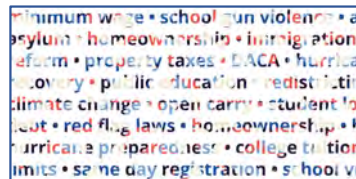
Voters' Feelings / Positions / Expressions

- "My vote doesn't count."
- "What difference will my vote make/" (apathy)
- "I don't trust government."



Political Issues / Candidates

- Gerrymandering of districts
- Non-responsiveness of elected officials
- Polarization of voters
- Candidates on the ballot
- Issues on the ballot



Effect of Presidential Preference Primaries

- Higher turnout for Presidential Preference Primaries
- Lower turnout in midterm (off-year) elections
- Closed Presidential Preference Primaries exclude NPAs and minor party voters



Socioeconomic Indicators

- Poverty
- Lack of transportation
- Limited access to pre-election resources / education



Low Voter Turnout Potential Solutions



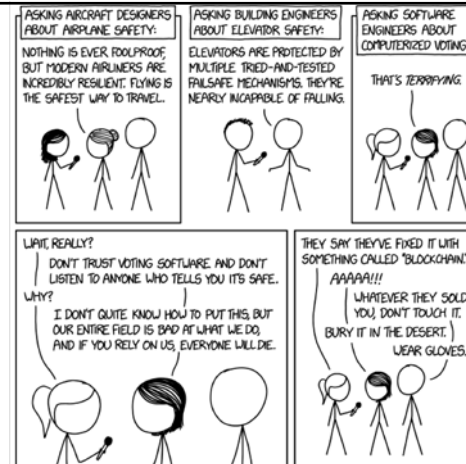
Potential Administrative Solutions

- Continue: early voting; SOE election reminders to voters; “motor voter” registration at the DMV; pre-registration for 16-year-olds.
- Implement: automatic voter registration for 18-year-olds; Election Day (aka “same day”) voter registration; same day change of party affiliation; vote-by-mail exclusively; on-line voting*.
- Reduce registration book close out date to less than 29 days.
- Establish open vote centers (voter portability).
- Make Election Day a holiday.



*Sorry, millennials, but secure on-line voting is not ready for prime time!

“My position is that Internet voting will be trustworthy at some point, but we don’t know how to do it now.”
David Dill
Stanford University
Computer Security Expert



Potential Political Solutions

- Switch from closed to open primary system
- Establish threshold criteria for write-in candidates to qualify
- Mandate compulsory voting
- Implement and hold a national primary day
- Monitor Voter ID or other potential voter suppression influences
- Fund elections publicly to eliminate corrupting influence of \$\$\$
- Put ballot initiatives on the Primary—not General—Election ballot
- Create an independent redistricting commission



Potential Educational Solutions

- Implement / continue voter election education
- Implement more / better civics education
- Implement bipartisan policy center ideas



Major Findings from Interviews with Supervisors of Elections and from Leaders of Political Parties



Major Findings from SOE Interviews

- Oppose same day registration.
- Highlight vote-by-mail and early voting as contributors to higher turnout.
- Support open voter centers (Election Day portability, like early voting).
- Support closing the “write-in candidate” loophole.
- Top three contributors to low voter turnout:
 - Lack of competitive races
 - Ballot issues
 - Voter apathy



Major Findings from Party Leader Interviews

- 50/50 split in support of / opposition to open primaries.
 - Opponents cite risk of political manipulation, loss of party control.
 - Supporters **also** cite risk of political manipulation.
- Mixed results re write-in candidates:
 - 7 opposed write-in candidates
 - 6 favored write-in candidates
 - 2 were neutral re write-in candidates



Input from Other State Leagues



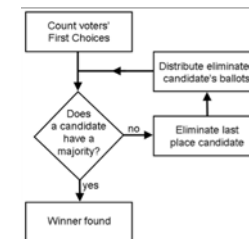
Six State Leagues surveyed

- LWV Arizona supports Instant Runoff Voting (IRV).
- LWV California supports election types that achieve a majority winner, such as IRV.
- LWV Michigan supports its state's open primary system.
- LWV New York has tried unsuccessfully to change its state's closed primary system.
- LWV Oregon and LWV Ohio are conducting their own Primary Election System studies, which are still underway.



Other State League Input

- LWV Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St Paul MN): IRV is working well in both cities
- LWV Pierce County (Washington): IRV was tried and rejected due to dissatisfaction with the results



Millennials Survey Results

- Two surveys conducted:
 - “Self select” (via email) of individuals 18–34 years of age
 - Random telephone interviews (using same questions)
- Results:
 - Millennials do **not** want to register with a political party.
 - They want real candidate choice in elections.
 - They favor open primaries.
 - They favor same day registration and change of party affiliation.



LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

MILLENNIALS WOULD MAKE UP OVER
35% OF THE ELECTORATE
 IF THEY VOTED

SOURCE: BLOOMBERG VIEW

Conclusions

- Candidate quality, competitive races and ballot initiatives are top reasons voters turnout.
- Florida primary turnout lags behind 76% of states with open-type systems.
- 27% of Florida voters are excluded by our closed primary system.
- NPA voters are increasing, especially among millennials
- Experts, advocates and millennials support same day registration, but SOEs do **not**.
- SOEs support vote centers to eliminate “wrong precinct” voters.

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Conclusions (cont'd)

- SOEs, experts and advocates support closing the write-in candidate loophole
 - 1.6 million voters excluded in 2016!
- Florida Association of SOEs favors exclusive vote-by-mail and elimination of in-person voting
- Party leaders split 50/50 re open primaries
- None of 6 State Leagues interviewed support a Top Two primary
- Open style primaries require voters to select a party ballot, eliminating voter choice across party lines on a race-by-race basis

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Last Word

The choices we make in Florida can serve as a template for other states to empower their voters and “Fix our Democracy.”

